

Circle Punch Explained

Edited from notes by (alphabetically): F. M. Arndt (#1013), John Grant (#2605), Rudy Roy (#1124), Bob Schwerdt (505L) and Harvey Tilles (LM-7)

In last month's Bulletin I ran a quick note "Nutmeg #90 Lot 4285 Raises a Question." The basis of the note was a copy of a US postage stamp (Sc#206) with a punch of 8-holes in a circle. It was a pattern I didn't recognize and was unable to identify. Thanks to several members of the Club the mysterious has been demystified.

Bob and others pointed to the Scott Specialized US Catalog, noting SC#s206, and 207. So I checked and found that Sc#206 includes a listing for a variety "Punched with 8 small holes in a circle." This stamp is valued mint at \$190.00, the italics indicating an approximate value based on a limited number of transactions; there is no value for a cancelled copy. With identical language Sc#207 catalogs for \$210.00 mint. The note under Sc#156 and SC#158 indicates stamps with a "cogwheel punch." Prices here are higher than for the 8-hole circle punches.

John cites two additional sources of information about the circle of holes. Lester Brookma's *The United States Postage stamps of the 19th Century* Volume II, and *The Micarelli Identification Guide to U. S. Stamps* (under the 1870-1871 issues discussion) both list and explain this punch.

Now, knowing what to look for, I have located mention of this variety under "Paper, Douglas Patent" in Kenneth Woods *This is Philately*. So, what is this item?

The Douglas paper varieties were stamps produced on a two-layered security paper. The two papers used were of different thickness, The base layer paper was a thicker paper to which a thinner sheet

was attached. Printing was applied to the upper, thin paper, and some bled through to the lower paper. Prior to affixing the thin sheet to the thicker sheet, a pattern of eight holes in a circle was punched through the thinner paper; they were arranged such that the pattern appeared once per final stamp. When soaked from an envelope the two layers separated making the resulting two 'stamps' easy to detect if an attempt was made to reuse them. About 10,000 were printed from plates #361 and 362. They were sold through the Washington, D.C. Post Office with some sold directly to dealers

This was just one of many early attempts to discourage the cleaning and reuse of postage stamps. In addition to this experiment, other early experiments to discourage reuse of postage stamps included a variety of trial inks for canceling devices, punch holes of other types, cuts in the stamps, or devices which scraped the stamps to make them easily identifiable as being reused stamps.

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Circle Punch Explained (Cont.)

In addition various types of ‘grills’ were imprinted on stamps breaking the structure of paper in an attempt to make canceling ink better penetrate the paper. Specific mention was made by a couple of you of the cogwheel punches found in Sc#156 and Sc#158.

But, the most interesting alternative to a simple ink killer-cancel was noted by Rudy. He mentioned the use of gunpowder, incorporated into stamps in a manner similar to the paper caps available for the cap guns of his (and my) youth. Upon being struck by the canceling device, the powder exploded destroying a portion of the stamp. Rudy also noted: “...a brief descriptive overview is in the Scott Specialized intro section under Patent Defacing Cancellations.”

Harvey’s comments get into very real questions concerning the current *Scott Catalog* information. Scott lists the circle punch under the heading “Douglas Patent” but Harvey writes:

No such Patent issued by Patent Office...I've had this discussion for many years...Patents are issued on Mondays...no such patent issued at the time of the usage of the 1c and 3c stamp...

It is a modification of the Patent issued to Charles Steel - patent # 86592. This was for a double paper stamp. ”

All agree, this experimental punch does not fit the description of perfin as we generally use the term. My interpretation of this doubled paper variety is that, in essence, it is an experimental form of precanceling, a punch applied to the stamp prior to purchase to allowed only a single use of a postage stamp.
